

All My Critical Mistakes by TeenCaterpillar

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Summary:

On the worst nights, when his cheeks stung from slaps and his heart stung from words that pierced through him, Billy let himself imagine what it would be like.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

End at Chapter One if you desire pure angst, end at Chapter Two if you want that happy ending I couldn't help but write.

If you haven't listened to the song [Critical Mistakes by 888](#), I highly recommend it. It's a Billy song, through and through. It's what inspired this, though it diverged and got away from me *real* quickly lol.

Anyway, this is unbeta'd and hope y'all enjoy~

Billy stared down at the girl, Eleven, Jane, below him. Looked into her eyes as she cried, reaching up and cupping his cheek.

“She was beautiful...”

Billy closed his eyes, tears spilling down his cheeks.

The thing was, he shouldn't have been surprised this happened. He shouldn't have thought that this could have gone any differently. That he might've made it. Might've gotten a chance to get out. To really live.

People like him didn't get that.

Billy turned, looking up at the monster, dripping it's melted flesh onto the floor of the destroyed mall. He stared up at it, finding a sense of calm wash over him. Kinda like the waves, gently lapping at him when he lay in the shallowest part of the water, just letting the water flow over his skin. Let it flow over and around him, taking the pain and stress and anger away. Leaving him feeling at peace, feeling like part of something clear and good.

The creature roared and Billy roared back. When it's weird tentacle thing shot out, aiming for the girl who saved him, brought his mind back enough, he didn't think. He just moved. His arms shot out and stopped it, a scream torn from his gut from the force and strength

needed to stop it.

This isn't what he'd wanted.

Billy had wanted to go back *home*. Back to the water, whatever ocean it was. He knew the Pacific, but California was... California itself wasn't home. The water was. The ocean was. And Billy had wanted to go *back*. He couldn't wash himself of his pain and mistakes in a fucking lake. In a fucking pool. He needed the salt water lapping at him, ruining his hair but cooling him to his core.

He wanted Steve there.

Billy felt something stick into his side and he stumbled, thoughts jarred from his mind. Another sharp pain on the other side of his ribs, impaled again. Billy coughed, blood bubbling from his lips. More pain as he was impaled twice more. His blood was black, he could see it seeping into his shirt when he looked down. Black, like his insides. Black like...

"But *why*?" Steve asked. The sky was dark, nearly black. Thunder rumbled low in the distance as the storm got closer. Billy looked away, unable to keep looking into Steve's eyes.

"I turn 18 this summer," Billy answered. "And I'm leaving. So there's really no point in us continuing... whatever this is." Boyfriends. They were boyfriends. But Billy hadn't let Steve label it. Wasn't sure he would be able to leave Hawkins behind him if he did. Steve didn't even let out a sound. When Billy looked back, Steve's head was down. His fingers were gripping the door frame so hard his knuckles were white.

"Yeah," Steve finally bit out. His voice was rough, *hurt*, and Billy wanted to take it all back. Thunder rumbled again and the black sky opened up, rain beginning to pour down. Billy didn't move, let the water wash over him. Wash away his guilt and sadness. "I guess not." Steve looked up again and Billy felt some of his resolve crumble.

Steve didn't cry. He pushed his feelings down. He waited until they boiled over and he couldn't bottle them up anymore. This time was no different. He looked blank, eyes empty as he shoved everything

down and away. Billy knew that face. He'd seen that face leaving the party at Tina's on Halloween.

"Well--" Billy began. Steve just shook his head and shut the door. Billy should've expected that. He waited a moment, hands itching to pound on the door and take it all back.

He didn't.

Billy spit up more blood as something sank deep into his chest. It lifted him, his body sagging as he gave in. He heard screaming, something that even sounded like his name, but his vision was already starting to blur. He felt like he was full of sand, full of cement, ready to sink down. The tentacle pulled from his chest and his head rolled back.

"**Billy!**" Steve. Billy's lips twitched in a small smile, though it faded as the rest of the tentacles pulled out, letting him drop to the floor. He couldn't move, couldn't really even think. Lights flashed above him, bright and colorful. Fourth of July. Fireworks. He stared at the beast as it screamed, sparks enveloping it. It was terrifying and beautiful all at once.

Just like the ocean.

On the worst nights, when his cheeks stung from slaps and his heart stung from words that pierced through him, Billy let himself imagine what it would be like. Waking up to the sun, bright against the water. Light would sparkle and dance along the surface, the sunrise filling him with warmth as he awoke. Steve would be there, hair mussed from sleep as he snored lightly. Billy would run his fingers through those locks, would smile as Steve leaned into the touch, even in his sleep. It would be perfect, each morning, as they rose with the sun. Billy would go to their bay window and look out at the new day, bright with opportunity for them both.

Steve would wrap his arms around Billy's waist, chin on his shoulder as they ignored morning breath and kissed. Who cared when life was perfect? When they lived by the ocean, close to the water as can be. When they woke up with each other each morning, so in love and so *happy*.

He thought of that now.

“Billy!” Max cried. He felt her hands push him over and he cracked his eyes open. She was crying, looking down at him. She was dirty and bleeding, scraped up and bruised. And she was crying. For him. “No, no, no, no,” she repeated, voice shaking as she pressed her hands to his chest. Pressure to stop the bleeding. Just like he’d taught her.

“I’m sorry,” Billy croaked, coughing up more black bile. “I’m sorry, Max,” he said again, voice broken and weak. “I’m so fucking sorry--”

“Tell me again later, when I can be mad at you,” she snapped, scared and crying. She wiped at her eyes with her arm, black covering her hands. “Billy, you have to apologize to me later, okay? You can’t-- You can’t--” Billy used all the energy he had to grip her wrist as she continued to press. He looked up at her, words still stuck on his tongue. Max shook her head, mouth twisted in a grimace. She let out tiny sobs and kept pressing. Billy smiled at her as best he could before looking back up at the sky. There really was nothing like the stars out here. With such little light pollution they shone down and Billy sighed, closing his eyes as his hand went limp.

If he couldn’t see the ocean last, the night sky would do.

2. Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

The happy or at least hopeful ending these boy deserve.

There was a steady beeping coming from somewhere and Billy's entire body ached. Breathing hurt, his throat hurt, his head hurt, everything *hurt*. His ears were ringing, sending jolts through him, but as the high pitched sound faded, he could hear someone talking.

--o with you. Why didn't you want me to? Why did you have to--" A shuddery breath and a wet exhale. "I never even got to yell at you about it, I never got to change your mind, or at least *try*." Steve was crying, Billy could hear it in his voice. His fingers twitched, hand wanting to reach out. But Billy still felt like he couldn't move. It felt like his body was made of cement. "Fuck, Billy," Steve bit out. "I *loved* you. I still fucking do, even though you broke my heart." Billy tried opening his eyes but it was hard. He needed to apologize, needed to tell Steve he was *wrong* to do what he did, but he still felt like he was moving through molasses. Everything was a strain but he needed to open his eyes at *least*, he needed to say *something*. "Why didn't you want me?" Steve's voice was small, nothing like Billy's ever heard.

Billy could feel tubes in his throat, knew he needed them, so instead, he painstakingly moved his pointer and middle fingers, finding Steve's hand on the bed. He heard a sharp intake of breath as he tapped on the back of Steve's hand.

Dit, dah, dah.

Dit, dah.

Dah, dit.

Dah.

Dah, dit, dah, dah.

Dah, dah, dah.

Dit, dit, dah.

Want you.

Steve had been a boy scout, his parents hadn't let him have a choice really, and the one thing he was able to get from the whole thing was morse code. He hadn't been particularly interested in it at first, but as time went on, and Steve began to fidget, tapping his knee or desk or anything really, it became something fun for him. He could cuss out his dad at dinner. He could tell the teachers where to stuff it. And eventually, he and Billy used it. They communicated through morse code in class or in the hall, covering it with a friendly pat on the back, or a teasing shove. *Love you. Ass. Quarry?*. Hiding in plain sight.

It came in handy now.

And as much as Steve wanted to press, ask him *then why did you say that to me, why did you hurt me, why didn't you talk to me*, he needed to alert the nurse. He pressed the call button, gripping Billy's hand as he waited for someone to come. Billy still hadn't opened his eyes, but this was a huge step. He'd been out for a long time now, healing from his punctured lung. Steve had brought Max when she wanted to visit, an excuse so he could see him too.

And he didn't know *why*. Billy had dumped him. For no good reason, in Steve's opinion. But he couldn't stay away. Not after... Not after everything.

Billy's eyes cracked open as the nurse came in, gently getting Steve to move so she could look Billy over. Steve hated how relieved, how *happy* he was to see those baby blues. He hated that he still loved Billy with everything inside him. It would all be so much easier if he didn't.

Steve had never told Billy, had never mentioned, that he had always imagined them leaving together. He didn't care much where they went, but had always assumed it would be California. He'd fall asleep, warm and happy in Billy's arms, dreaming of a place where they could do this without worry. Where it was *their* room, not Steve's. *Their* home, not his parents'. Steve had made a lot of silent plans, hoping to save up over the summer and propose the move to Billy.

And then Billy had--

“Mr. Harrington,” the nurse called, bringing him out of his thoughts.

“Hm?” Steve replied.

“Unfortunately we’re going to need to start running some more diagnostic tests on Mr. Hargrove, so we’ll have to cut his visiting hours short today.” Her voice was apologetic, but firm. Steve nodded, standing up. He looked down at Billy, sucking his bottom lip into his mouth. Billy looked up at him, eyes resigned. Steve rubbed the back of his head, taking a deep breath.

“I’ll be back,” Steve said to Billy. “I’ll be bringing Max tomorrow anyway. She’ll wanna see you.” Billy stared at him, looking out of it. Steve wasn’t even totally sure Billy could understand him. “Yeah.” And with that, Steve turned and left, mind and heart racing.

He’d been so ready to chew Billy out for the last month. Steve had gone over what he was gonna say in the shower, at work, while driving. The classic “have an argument you can’t lose in your head” sorta dealing with heartbreak. Steve took a shuddery breath and pulled to the side of the road, even though he was in the middle of nowhere. He leaned his forehead against the steering wheel, breathing and counting so his heart could slow down. Everything he’d wanted to say had just disappeared when he felt Billy’s fingers. When he saw him open his eyes. Because despite the fact that Billy had taken his heart and smashed it, Steve still loved him. He loved him so fucking much.

“Fuck!” Steve screamed, slamming his hand against the wheel, over and over. “Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, *fuck!*” He wasn’t even sure what he was screaming about. It was just all too much. Everything was just... Too much. With a deep sigh, Steve pulled back onto the road, heading for Robin’s house. She’d know what to do. She already knew he was getting over a break up, and now that he knew about *her*, it was really only fair to share. He hadn’t gotten the chance because *suddenly monster*, but he did want to. Needed to, now. Because there was too much going on inside him. He was angry, so angry with Billy, but he was so relieved he was alive. He wanted to throttle and kiss him and Steve wasn’t sure which urge was stronger.

After Robin talked some sense into Steve, reminded him that Billy

had made his choice and Steve could only follow Billy's lead, Steve went home. Then, he took Max to visit Billy the next day, as promised. And the next. And the next. It was a full week of Steve bringing Max every day so she could catch Billy up, yell at him, and then talk with him in hushed whispers about home. About how Neil had disappeared with the Mind Flayer and how Susan was making sure Billy's room was going to be comfortable when he got back. Steve honestly zoned out a little. He wasn't sure Billy wanted him in his life, even if it *did* sound like he was gonna be stuck in Hawkins for a lot of recovery, so he didn't want to force his way in. Instead, he stayed in the peripheral, waiting to see if Billy would call him back or let him go.

Billy was going a little crazy. Steve was aloof, Max was overbearing, and he was still too weak to make it a full lap around the hospital floor. He wanted to bang his head against the wall every time the physical therapist came in to remind him *Your body won't ever return to the way you remember it*, because of fucking *course* it wouldn't. Billy wasn't a doctor, but he wasn't dumb enough to think he'd come out of this good as new. He nearly lost a fucking *lung*. If he had to see that smug bastard's face one more time--

"Billy!" Max snapped. Literally. Snapped in front of his face. Billy blinked and turned his glare to her, frowning as he lay in the hospital bed. "Are you even listening?"

"Fucking hell, Maxine," he grouched, ignoring her pointed *it's Max*. "Can't a guy zone out? Lemme just fucking veg out for bit, would ya?" Max let out a loud noise of disdain, but she crossed her arms and sat angrily in the chair next to his bed, silent. Billy let the moment hang for a few seconds before sighing. "Sorry, Max." He was trying that out. Saying sorry and actually meaning it. So far it kinda sucked, but he and Max were doing better and he truly couldn't hate that. "I just... I'm feeling a little stuck. Angry. It's not you." Max relaxed a little and gave him a nod. She picked at the frayed hem of her cut off jean shorts and Billy looked out the window. Steve had brought her before leaving the room, going who knew where. "Does... Does Steve stick around or just--"

"I don't know what he does, Billy," Max sighed. "I really don't. He doesn't leave, 'cause his car is always in the same spot, but I don't... I

mean. I think he just feels weird hanging around in the room?" Max didn't know. No one knew, really. So Billy didn't expect her to know why he was asking. Billy nodded and looked out the window again. "I--" Max began, grabbing his attention. "Why do you keep asking about him? He always asks what we talk about and like, did you guys have a fight or something before-- Before all...this." Billy looked at the ceiling. It wasn't a fight, not really. Billy weighed his options. But, he'd always been too cocksure and impulsive, and now with Neil gone...

"I just wanna talk to him about something I said. Tell him sorry." Billy was slightly unnerved by the stare he got from Max. Like she was putting pieces together. "Just ask," he said, knowing her too well.

"What did you say to him?" She blurted out. "Did you say something mean? Is that why he was moping all June? Why he never took us to the pool?" Billy's stomach sank a little. So Steve *had* actively avoided him. He'd hoped it was just the fact that Steve had his own pool, but he couldn't even be too upset. Not only was this his own fault, Steve was an avoider, so no wonder he'd never come. "Because Steve was like, really happy until after graduation and then he got all sad and I *know* it wasn't because of having to work at Scoops because he actually ended up being really okay with that--"

"Max, holy shit, lemme fucking answer," Billy replied. Max glared, but snapped her mouth shut. "Honestly? And don't. Don't tell anyone." That made Max's glare fade. She leaned forward, curious. "We were kinda... Kinda seeing each other." Max stared at him, eyes wide. "And I maybe broke it off? In a shitty way?" Once again, she was glaring. He deserved that. "And I just wanna apologize--"

"Okay, okay," Max said, tucking some hair behind her ear. "I thought you told Neil you were like, over that phase or whatever--"

"You and I *both* know how much of a lie that was, Max," Billy replied softly. That made her quiet for a moment, unable to make eye contact.

"Well," she mumbled after a moment, "Why did... You were seeing girls and stuff so I thought--"

"Max, I don't." Billy looked at the ceiling before closing his eyes. It was gonna be easier to speak if he didn't have to make eye contact. "I don't blame you for California, but I wasn't about to let anyone fucking *know* that nothing had changed. I wasn't gonna be forced to come *here* and not try to preserve what little freedom I had." He heard her inhale shakily. "I'm a good liar, Max. And I was lying to *everyone*. Except... Except Steve, eventually. We got to talking and sharing smokes and it just kinda..."

Billy remembered well the day that they got stoned at Steve's house and were dicking around in the kitchen, trying and failing to make cookies. Billy had too much fun tossing flour at Steve and Steve had too much fun eating the dough before it was finished. Billy had used his thumb to get some dough from the corner of Steve's mouth, licking it off with a grin. And then... Steve had kissed him. And he'd kissed back.

"You really liked him, huh?" Max said. Billy shrugged, eyes still closed.

"Still do. Probably kinda love him." He hissed when she pinched his arm, making him open his eyes and turn to glare at her. She stared him down, tiny brows drawn together and matching her pinched mouth perfectly.

"So then why did you break it off?"

"Because I'm an idiot. Because I was scared of how much I liked him. Because I thought it would be easier for us *both* if I just..." He sighed and looked back at the ceiling again. "I just thought a lot of bull shit and fucked it up. I wanted out of here so badly, that I was willing to fuck over the only person here who made this town worthwhile." Max let out a wounded sound and Billy winced, looking at her. She was glaring at the ground, tears building up. "Shit, I didn't--"

"No I... I get it." Max sniffled and harshly rubbed at her nose. "We weren't like, on great terms or anything for a long time, and even if-- Even if we had been I know how much you miss the ocean. Lakes just aren't the same."

"They really aren't, and I don't know why these midwest hicks seem

to think they are--”

“I know! Lucas keeps telling me how *cool* a lake can be, that I should see one of the Great Lakes, but like-- Ugh! It’s so not the same!” Billy grinned as Max ranted, fly away hairs giving her a red glow.

“Yeah,” he replied softly. “Exactly.” They stayed in amicable silence for a while, just smiling softly at each other. Finally, Max stood up. “We still got time,” Billy said, glancing at the clock.

“Well yeah, but you wanna talk to Steve or not?” She said, putting her hands on her hips. Billy grinned, even as his stomach did flips in his torso.

“Thanks, shitbird,” he said fondly. Max grinned back as she headed for the door to his room.

“Any time, asshole,” she replied. And then she was gone. Billy adjusted himself on the bed, sitting up as much as he could. He hated how it made him out of breath to just *sit up*, but he also couldn’t forget the feeling of shame from relying on someone to help him sit up only last week, and how much *worse* that felt. Billy caught his breath and chewed on his cuticle, spitting out any bits he chewed all the way off. It felt like ages, but eventually he heard the door open and Steve’s soft footsteps on the tile.

“Max said you wanted to talk to me,” Steve said, voice quiet as he stood at the foot of Billy’s bed. At a distance, Billy noted. “If this is about--”

“I just wanted to apologize,” Billy said, cutting Steve off. Steve stared at him, eyebrows raised. “It... I did what I thought would hurt less and I was just fucking wrong. And I don’t need forgiveness. I just.” He looked up from where he was twisting his bed sheets and Steve’s face stayed impassive. “I took my issues out on you and it wasn’t fair, and it wasn’t okay, and I’m just... sorry.”

“Why the fuck did you think that would hurt *less*?” Steve blurted. He was angry, still really fucking angry, but also he couldn’t help the hope fluttering inside his heart. “In what world would that hurt *less*?”

"The one where you said no to coming with me," Billy replied quietly. Steve blinked. "We both know loss, albeit differently." They'd talked about it. Billy's mom leaving, Steve's parents' distance. "And I couldn't handle the idea of you rejecting the offer to come with me. So I, like an asshole, made the decision for you." Steve could feel his anger leaking out of him. It was still there, and he knew he had every right to it, but he could understand why. It hadn't been *right*, but Steve still trusted Billy. Call him an idiot, everyone else did, but he *trusted* Billy, and that probably wasn't going to change.

"I would have gone," Steve said. Billy gave him a sad smile.

"Yeah, I know that now. Should have known it then." Silence fell between them and Billy stared at his bedsheets. He felt tears welling up in his eyes and he didn't want to cry. This wasn't about him, but *fuck* if it hurt hearing *would have*. "Doesn't matter anyway," he mumbled, trying to push through the feeling. "Don't think I could live out there on my own like this." He heard Steve moving and glanced to the side. Steve sat next to him, face drawn together.

"So, you're staying?" Billy laughed humorlessly.

"Don't really have a choice. They wanna do tests and a bunch of other bullshit. They're just waiting until I can make a full lap around the floor before they interrogate me about what happened and--" Billy cut himself off. He didn't wanna think about the fucking thing. Not right now. "Anyway," he rasped, "Susan is making up a room for me and I guess I'll live with her until I can get my own place."

"Can I ask you something?" Steve asked.

"Just did," Billy replied on reflex. Steve gave him an unimpressed look, though it wasn't effective seeing as he was smirking a bit.

"Are you gonna keep making decisions for me, or are you gonna talk to me about shit?" It was genuine, but it threw Billy for a loop.

"Huh?"

"Like, if we do this, are you gonna keep pulling that kinda stunt, or do you promise to talk to me, or just someone, about what you're

feeling before it gets to that?" Billy stared at him, trying to compute.

"Okay," Billy said, shaking his head. "Did I miss something--?" Steve flushed a bit.

"No, I just-- I mean-- If you're *staying*, would you. You could. I mean. You could stay. With me." It was Steve's turn to look away as Billy gaped. "I thought about it a lot. Us being... Being *together* together. Our own place. Somewhere that was far away from *everything*. And for some reason I still really fucking love you. I'm mad, and I will be for a bit, but... But if you're willing to make things work, so am I." Steve finally looked back at Billy before tentatively taking his hand. "I love you, Billy Hargrove," he murmured. "Heaven help me, I do." Billy felt Steve's finger tap his palm, his I love you repeated in short and firm presses to his skin.

"You-- I mean--" Billy got out, words failing him. He hadn't expected this, hadn't let himself hope for this, and yet here it was. A second chance. A new start at life, at love, at everything. And well, Billy was no fool. "I love you, Steve Harrington," he said, voice trembling from the lump in his throat. "And if you'll have me, you bet your fucking fat ass I'll stay." Steve giggled at first, before it turned to snorts, and then full belly laughter. Billy eventually joined in, though it ended in a coughing fit. His lungs still weren't up to much, but he ignored the pain as he smiled at Steve.

Billy had a new dream.

He imagined a home, a kitchen with dirty dishes piled next to it, a bed made up on one side and not the other. He imagined lazy morning kisses, cuddles on the couch, and hands intertwined on the dining table. But this time, it didn't seem like something so far out. Something unattainable.

This time, it wasn't so much a *dream* as it was a *future*.